

# AMBOY MEN DEAD AND MISSING IN TRAGEDY

EXTRA

Perth Amboy Evening News

EXTRA

VOL. XLIV. No. 104.

PERTH AMBOY, N. J., SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 1924.

THREE CENTS Eighteen Cents a Week Delivered By Carrier

# OVER 30 DEAD, MANY MISSING AND INJURED IN BIG EXPLOSION

## START INVESTIGATION OF GREAT EXPLOSION; MANY LIVES MENACED

An immediate investigation of the facts surrounding the explosion at the Nixon Nitration works was started by the detectives of Prosecutor Stricker's office shortly after the reports of the accident came through.

While the cause of the explosion has not been established it was learned that the operations carried on by the Amolite Corporation which is a subsidiary of the Columbia Salvage Company, was the final operation in connection with the salvaging of T. N. T.

The Columbia Salvage company has been engaged in extracting the T. N. T. from loaded shells after which the substance was turned over to the Amolite company, which operates in a portion of the old Nixon Nitration works, for the extraction of the ammonium nitrate. The extracted material, known as "soup," is stored in liquid form and left to harden, and it was in that substance that the fire and explosion was thought to have started.

The Amolite company is managed by a New York man named Shrigue and Edward Smith of Metuchen. At least thirty people were killed according to the investigation of Detective David and Fitzpatrick, and these officers expressed the belief late this afternoon, that many bodies may have been burned beyond recognition.

Many of the dead and injured were employees at the Nixon nitration plant, who were in the line before the paymaster's window when the blast occurred.

It has not been definitely established how many people were on the site at the time, but it is thought that about fifty people were working in the immediate vicinity.

Six magazines on the meadows at Raritan Arsenal collapsed shortly after the blast was felt and the county authorities expressed surprise that further fatalities had not resulted from that cause.

All preparations were made at the Muhlenberg hospital in Plainfield to receive dead or injured. The county authorities expressed surprise that further fatalities had not resulted from that cause.

Blazing sections of the building were scattered to all parts of the Nixon property, so that fire soon became general. The Raritan Arsenal fire department was on the scene soon after the blast, getting into action to check the widespread fire. Twenty-five small buildings at one time used by employees of the Nixon works but which were unoccupied today, were destroyed. Fire which followed attacked two other buildings and fire departments of several surrounding towns were rushed to the scene.

One entire family living near the Amolite building was wiped out by the force of the blast.

The local exchange of the telephone company was swamped with calls during the afternoon and evening, and the operators whose hours of work expired during the afternoon were kept at their switchboards to assist in handling the vast amount of business. No estimate could be given as to the number of calls that were handled, but the capacity of the exchange was taxed to its full capacity as it was during the big Morgan explosion in the fall of 1918. Hundreds of calls for information were answered by the Evening News.

Tottenville and the entire lower section of Staten Island was shaken by the blast. Buildings rocked in all sections and many fearing that a repetition of the Morgan explosion which did so much damage to the lower part of the island at their homes within a short notice. Lieutenant White at the Sixtieth precinct station at Tottenville kept busy answering telephonic calls as to where the explosion was located and it was not until the Evening News gave him the report that it was known what the noise was all about.

### RED CROSS OFFERS HELP

Soon after the report of the explosion died away, the local chapter of the Red Cross, through Mrs. Charles H. Seguire, offered to give whatever aid was possible. Although the local office had been closed for the day, Mrs. Seguire declared the chapter stood ready to send first aid equipment to the scene and volunteers were ready to report for duty at the plant if the occasion required. Mrs. Seguire then communicated with the New Brunswick Chapter in order to learn if the services of the local chapter would be required.

## CITY FIREMEN CALLED TO FIRE AT NIXON PLANT

This City Shaken by Tremendous Explosion at 11:30 This Morning

AMBULANCE IS SENT

Camp Raritan Makes Request—Red Cross Offers Aid—Buildings Rattle Here

Due to the fact that local residents were killed, missing or injured, there was a shadow of sorrow over this city tonight somewhat like that after the great Morgan Ordnance Depot explosion in October of 1918.

Today's explosion at Nixon's plant at Bonhamtown, occurred shortly before noon and the fact that it occurred in the daytime and not at night as was the case in the Morgan flareup, aided somewhat in keeping terror from the district.

Immediately following the explosion this morning mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers of persons who were employed in the vicinity of Bonhamtown started making inquiries about their loved ones, for fear that they would suffer the same fate as the employees at Morgan in 1918. There are many worried ones tonight waiting for members of their family to return, dead or alive.

Following receipt of word regarding the explosion in this city Mayor William C. Wilson made an investigation and immediately arranged for the sending of a batch of local firefighters to the scene.

Lieutenant Andrew Jensen received a call from the plant for ambulances, nurses, doctors and any help available. He notified the Raritan Copper works, City hospital, American Smelting & Refining company and ambulances were sent from these places. Nurses and doctors also were notified.

Chaufeur William Buchan on his way back from the workhouse called local headquarters from Highland Park and was immediately sent to the scene to assist in carrying the injured persons from the plant.

Immediately after the initial report was received from the scene of the trouble, Lieutenant Jensen was assisted at headquarters by other department members in notifying nurses, doctors and any place where an ambulance or help of any kind could be obtained.

Mayor Wilson had calls sent in for the Garfield and Eagle companies of the local department when at 12:30 o'clock a call was received from the Raritan Arsenal, expressing fear that the fire would spread to the arsenal property.

An official of Camp Raritan who got in touch with Mayor Wilson by telephone asking him to send out the Raritan firemen to help fight the fire at Nixon's, informed the mayor that he felt sure more than one man had been killed.

The full force of the blast at the Nixon plant this morning was felt throughout the city and surrounding sections. Buildings in the heart of the city rocked and many ran from the places of business, while others stood aghast in the streets as waiting for another shock from the heavy detonation coming from the direction of the Raritan Arsenal. Many were of the opinion at first that a heavy charge had been set off in the vicinity of Elm street, where the blasting for the new sewer outlet is being built for the change to be made for the new branch over the Raritan to South Amboy.

The concussion of the blast caused one of the heavy show windows of the tailor shop of M. Osate at 124 State street to break. The window, Mr. Osate told Officer A. Peterson, had been slightly split some five months ago by a boy. The tailor said he was at work, when the plate glass was shattered, as the noise of the blast reached him. No one was injured.

Windows were broken and walls were cracked throughout Keasbey, according to information coming from that section of the county. The Klein building at Keasbey, one of the largest brick structures in that place, suffered and people ran from their homes and places of business as the loud rumble died away and a heavy cloud of smoke was seen to rise from the direction of the arsenal.

## MORGUES FILLED WITH THE DEAD; INJURED CROWD HOSPITALS; MEN IN PAY LINE AT NIXON'S VICTIMS ENTIRE FAMILY IS WIPED OUT; SOLDIERS ON GUARD

More than thirty are dead, many are missing and more than one hundred are injured many seriously as a result of the TNT explosion in the main building of the Nixon Nitration Works at Bonhamtown shortly before noon today.

Although only eight bodies had been recovered from the burning ruins up to a late hour this evening, twenty men were known to have been at work in the building where the explosion occurred and others were reported at work on the roof.

Early reports were to the effect that a Thomas Fitzgerald, a tinsmith of this city, is one of the dead.

Lester Spencer of Metuchen, Perth Amboy High School baseball pitcher and graduate of the State street institution in the year of 1914, was also killed. Spencer is the son of William Spencer, well known lawyer with offices in this city.

Numerous inquiries have been received at the News from local people about Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Dumas and their three children, former local residents, who were instantly killed when one of the plant buildings caved in. The Dumas people have relatives in this city.

The plant was operated by the Ammonite Company under a lease from the Nixon interests of which Lewis Nixon of New York is the head. The Ammonite Company was engaged in the manufacture of fertilizer from the chemicals taken from the high explosives bought from the government and taken from the shells at the Raritan Arsenal.

In smaller buildings the Nixon Company was engaged in the manufacture of celluloid novelties and other articles.

The explosion was felt throughout the countryside and the balloon shaped smoke oval which remained in the air for several minutes after the detonation, reminded many of the magazine explosions of 1918. Windows were shattered and buildings suffered other damage in buildings around the plant for a radius of about ten miles.

Flying embers from the fire ignited clumps of trees and farm buildings and in the settlement itself, the explosion and fire wrecked very building.

Close to one hundred government employees at the arsenal were the first to the rescue. Hurriedly dividing into parties they aided the injured, summoned fire departments from six nearby towns, called the State Police and notified all hospitals in the vicinity. Soon the wood-boarded roads were thick with hurrying ambulances and police and fire apparatus.

Soldiers from Camp Raritan were detailed to guard the property in the vicinity and for precautionary measures. The entire section is under military control.

The hollow in which the nitrate plant, built for war work lies was nothing more than a pit of fire early tonight. The heights surrounding the fire were thick with people watching the battle against the flames. Parties of police and ambulance men watched the time when they could enter the ruins of the main building. It was said that the recovery of any of the bodies of the victims there was doubtful.

The Perth Amboy ambulances and firemen sent to the scene did valiant work from the time they were detailed to Bonhamtown about noon today. It is possible that other companies from his city will be sent to the relief of the first detailed firefighters, if the fire continues to burn during the night.

Assistant Prosecutor John E. Toolan at an early hour this afternoon went to the scene of the explosion, preparatory to starting an investigation, though it was impossible to reach him and learn of what action he proposes to take. Prosecutor Joseph E. Stricker kept in close touch with the situation throughout the day.